



An Update from the CENTCOM Commander

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I've become quite familiar with the World Affairs Council; in fact, this is my fourth WAC event in the past year or so. It's great to be with you. You've had a tremendous lineup here. I guess Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs; Professor Stiglitz, Dr. Haass, and many others. This is clearly a chapter that has excelled in attracting people who are very much in the center of decision-making and the policy expertise business and, therefore in informing citizenship.

I should note before I begin that I am well aware that these kinds of talks, no matter who delivers them, can be a tad long and dry at times. As I reflected on that while gathering my thoughts on the flight west I recalled the classic story about the private, the general and the sergeant major who were captured by the enemy and sentenced to death by firing squad. Before carrying out the sentence, however, each was granted a final request.

The private, who had accepted his fate, asked for a beer and a bacon double-cheeseburger. The general stoically cleared his throat and asked for the opportunity to make a few remarks before he donned the blindfold, and the sergeant major promptly requested, "Could I just be shot before the general makes another speech?"

I'll try not to put you in the position of the sergeant-major. Thanks for laughing. You know the deal – I'm only as good as the material they give me. But folks out in this area have probably been in a similar situation.

What I would like to do during my own few remarks today, with the assistance of the obligatory slides that all army general officers require, Power Point is us – “Power Point Rangers” – along with a laser pointer, of course – the tools of the modern general – is to provide you with an update on the events in the Central Command area of responsibility. Afterward I’ll be happy to take any questions that you might have.

Just to remind you where CENTCOM falls in the grand scheme of things, there are six global combatant commanders, as we are called, who are responsible for the different areas of the world and as you can see, Central Command is actually – in terms of land mass – the smallest. There are also some other order called specified commands that provide various support throughout the world, like special operations command, foremost among them. Although Central Command is small, unfortunately it seems to have the lion’s share of the world’s problems.

We go from Egypt on the west to Pakistan in the east, Kazakhstan in the north and the waters off Somalia to the south. It’s an area that, in fact (and many in this room know) is very rich in petroleum resources; has extraordinary oil and natural gas resources.

Many of those go through various choke points such as the Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mandab, etc. It has numerous religions, ethnic groups and a lot of tensions between all of those, including tribes. It has a substantial youth population. In fact, some of the societies have a very, very significant population below the age of twenty-nine, and that will cause some significant challenges for those countries in the years hence.

It’s an area that is extraordinarily wealthy in certain places, with a \$100,000 per capita income in one of those states and has also among the poorest

countries with somewhere around \$800 per capita income average for some others.

As I mentioned, oil-rich but poor in water, and in many respects many in those countries lack the basic necessities; the basic services; the basic governance for a functioning and modern society.

So, we have all the challenges here. We've got, of course, transnational extremists such as al Qaeda. There is state-based aggression. Certainly, there are concerns with a number of the states in the region. We have piracy, especially right now in (nearby) waters that we're combating. They're smuggling arms to Hamas; to Lebanese Hezbollah in southern Lebanon; to Shiite extremist groups in Iraq; to organizations in Afghanistan and, of course we have the major operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and supporting, needless to say, the effort in Pakistan as well.

I'm going to spend the bulk of my time today on Iraq and Afghanistan and then save time for the question-and-answer if people want to address some of the other areas.

Just very briefly and sort of a one-snapshot slide to show you what we're trying to do in building these partnerships in the so-called stance to replace the new great game of the broad partnership against extremism and the illegal narcotics industry, working hard to support Pakistan – which has shown some heartening developments in the past five months in turning against the extremists who have now come to be seen as posing a true existential threat to their country – and have made some progress in that regard.

Obviously, the tough fight in Afghanistan, and I'll talk some about that. The efforts to insure maritime freedom of navigation; to counter the piracy; to

interdict the smuggling that I've talked about; building partnerships on the Arabian Gulf. I must note that Iran has become our best recruiting officer because of its provocative rhetoric and its provocative actions. We're keeping a very wary eye on Iran even as we're also opening the possibility, as you know, by the administration, to dialogue.

I'll talk some about Iraq, but we're also working in Lebanon, in particular – especially in the wake of what are recently encouraging elections with Assad Hariri as the prime minister now strident to reform the government there. We're working closely with Yemen, which is the only place now in the Arab Peninsula where there is a significant al Qaeda cell at this point, and working to help them; then also working to strengthen the partnership with Egypt and virtually all of the other countries in the region in a variety of security-assistance efforts.

Now we have found one of our biggest of the big ideas that guide us is that countering terrorism takes more than counterterrorist forces. You can't do in al Qaeda and the other trans-national extremists – and certainly the insurgent groups that have supported them; grown around them; provided them safe haven – with just counterterrorist forces. It takes a whole-of-government approach; a comprehensive counter-insurgency approach to do that, working obviously with partners and, in truth, with an "s" on the end of government because it is whole-of-*governments*, not just our government. We do not need, nor want, to go it alone.

These are the challenges that we face out there and it's a pretty decent list, obviously. We have, as they say, "a number of rocks in our rucksack" in the Central Command. We have to reverse that downward spiral that has characterized the situation in Afghanistan where, although there has been progress in extending education; health care; building roads; tele-communications; explosion and all the rest, nonetheless the security

situation has spiraled downward now substantially over the course of the last three years.

I mentioned supporting the developments in Pakistan. We need to make a substantial sustained commitment to that country, one that has seen us go and come over the years and cut them off for quite a period after the effort to get rid of the Soviets out of Afghanistan.

There have been gains in Iraq. I'll talk a good bit about that. Clearly, there have been setbacks as well, and I'll lay that out for you and show you where we stand there.

I mentioned the concern about the activities of Iran; its efforts to expand its influence in both legitimate ways and very much illegitimate ways and, of course, the questions about its nuclear ambitions. I did highlight again the efforts to support these strait states to take on these tasks and we're privileged to have not just the ambassadors in each of the countries to work with – each of the countries in which we have an ambassador – but also to have three special envoys that we work closely with in the Middle East peace process: Senator George Mitchell who, of course, is a long-time member of Capitol Hill and then was the key figure in negotiating the end of the Northern Ireland effort; Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who negotiated the Dayton Peace Accords in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the former Balkans; and also Ambassador Dennis Ross, who is working Iran and basically the rest of the Middle East peace part, if you will, for Central Command. Each of those is a presidential envoy and we link closely with them.

Well, here's the situation in Iraq. We've seen this year continued progress in a host of areas. We have seen the conduct of the elections back in January with a heartening outcome where the most sectarian parties were largely rejected in the form of the non-sectarian parties. They have seated the

provincial governments now. You see the security tasks being passed to our Iraqi partners. Our forces have been coming down and they will go down by another 80,000 or so over the course of the next twelve months, something we believe is appropriate and prudent and can be done.

Of course, the non-U.S. coalition partners have now departed. We've pulled out of the cities our combat forces, although we've retained coordination cells in Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, and have generally again handed off the lead for security tasks to our Iraqi partners who number now about 670,000. Although the quality is uneven with some units, many of them are actually very good now, especially the Iraqi Special Operations Forces of which there are substantial elements and are working hard to keep al Qaeda and other extremists also the Shiite extremist elements that are still there on the run. That is hugely important and is something that we support and enable in many different respects.

But lots of challenges ahead: Preparation of the elections coming up in January 2010. Iraq is already now all politics, all the time. The political speed dating is ongoing and they are very much engaged in that. There still are extremists. We saw that tragically, of course, with the events in Baghdad of a week or so ago when you had the horrific loss of life through the two suicide car bombings there. There are still influences from Iran and to a degree from Syria that are decidedly unhelpful.

There is mistrust between Sunni and Shia; Arab and Kurd; intra-Shia; intra-Sunni; competition in a variety of different forms. Hopefully it stays political. We used to say, "It's okay to shout, just don't shoot." The price of oil is going down, puts some real pressure on them in a budgetary sense, although they're doing okay now with it where it is in general. Building, increasingly, good basic services but still well below the demand when it comes to electricity at all-time records. Very recently oil production is up about 2000-

2003 levels this past month, and a number of other areas – major hospitals, open schools, etc. but still huge amounts still to be done.

And, then this very troublesome challenge of the internal downgrade disputes and the Kirkuk issue which is an oil-rich area that is disputed between the Arabs and the Kurds; and even between Shiites, Sunnis and Turkmen. So, lots of challenges but enormous progress in certain areas.

Before going into that, I want to explain the surge because the surge was not just 30,000 U.S. forces. It wasn't just 125,000 more Iraqi security forces that we developed during the course of the surge, nor the 100,000 Sons of Iraq we recruited, nor just a signal commitment. What this really did was it enabled us to implement the right approach – the right comprehensive counter-insurgency principles. I want to explain the big ideas that guided this surge and that really were what made the difference. Again, it was not just more forces; it was how those forces were used.

I know in here we have a lot of people who are strategic leaders and you know that the jobs of strategic leaders are to get the big ideas right, to communicate them effectively to your organization, oversee their implementation and then have a feedback mechanism that captures best practices and lessons so you can refine the big ideas, communicate them and tweak the implementation.

The biggest of the big ideas was the importance of securing the population and serving it – and to be seen doing both. We increased, for example, the number of locations in Baghdad where we lived with the people, the next big idea. That's the only way you can secure them. You cannot commute to the fight in counter-insurgency. You have to have a sustained security presence and you do that again by living with them.

You have to work together with everybody. Ambassador Crocker and I established that cooperation was not optional. Civil and military were going to work together. Special Forces were going to work with conventional forces. We were going to work with our Iraqi partners, etc. and that is hugely important because if you don't do it you cannot achieve unity of effort which is of all importance in counter-insurgency.

Now, don't get me wrong. All the soft stuff is important; you have to do jobs; basic services; nation building; all of that. But at the end of the day you also have to go out and kill or capture bad guys and that is something that only those in uniform can do adequately and that is something you have to do.

Now, when you start to clear an area you have to hold it. You can't clear and leave which is something that we did a few times over the years. By the way, the impressive development in Pakistan is that when they went into Swat District of the northwest frontier province this year they have cleared and stayed. They're going to hold it and they have a plan to do that and then to build in it as well.

Now, you also have to promote reconciliation. You cannot kill or capture your way out of an industrial-strength insurgency. You have to break off those who are reconcilable – who you have to figure out and identify – and then you have to kill or capture the irreconcilables.

You should only hand off transitions to your partners when they're ready for it. So insure the conditions are right before you try to hand off to the Iraqis. We were determined that in our strategic communications – our information operations – that our watch word; our motto; our guide would be "to be first with the truth." We were not going to try to put lipstick on pigs. If we had a problem we were going to stand up and say we had a problem and tell what we were going to do about it and when we made a mistake we admitted it.

We had to live our values and, in fact, I remember putting out a specific instruction on this when I got a bit of concern that maybe some of our troopers in the survey indicated that they'd be willing to look the other way as their fellows did other activities.

You've got to stress – this is a small-unit leader's endeavor – and you have to encourage initiative. That's how this works – you establish left and right limits on the road, if you will. You sketch out an azimuth and say "get on with it." I realized that we were making some progress in this regard when I was down with a captain on a patrol in southwest Baghdad and we came back to his command post. On this plywood door he had a sign that said, "In the absence of orders or guidance, figure out what they should have been and execute aggressively." I stole that sign.

You always have to be capturing best practices, worst practices, learning, adapting and sharing this with your subordinate elements because that is all-important. You have to be learning and adapting faster than the enemy who does, in fact, strive to do both of those as well.

When you apply this to al Qaeda in Iraq, we had a strategy for al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni extremists. We had another one, by the way, for the Shiite extremist elements. We had others for other different challenges that faced Iraq, but this was the primary challenge. It was al Qaeda in Iraq and the Sunni extremist brethren, and others. You cannot deal with this, again, with just counterterrorist forces – with just Special Forces.

Indeed, we banged away in Ramadi for four years and you still couldn't drive from one end through the center. Stay with me here, folks. You had to have conventional forces. You had to have Iraqi forces, both conventional and Special Forces. You have to recruit Sons of Iraq which comes from politics,

by tribal awakenings, as I recall – political reconciliation. You have to use intelligence. And by the way, the big breakthrough in intelligence has not been in any one discipline – it has been in the fusion of the products of all of those disciplines. I want to thank those from industry who are here who have done so much to enable us in this area, among many others.

You have to overhaul what you do in detainee operations. We had 28,000 Iraqi detainees at the height of the surge and we looked at these enclosures that had 800 – they were all treated humanely – but you had 800 people in a wired-in enclosure and it had become “terrorist university.” You had to stop that, so you had to do counter-insurgency inside the wire. You had to identify the irreconcilables and the hardcore and get them out of the population so that you could then do some reforming in preparation for integration of the ones that were left. By the way, we’re down under 9,000 now.

You have to work the reasons why people become insurgents in the first place: the dissatisfaction (again) with their opportunities in life, basic services, education, etc. You have to work outside the country. You have to try to get Syria to stop the flow of foreign fighters through their country – which, by the way, is down from about 120 at the height per month to below 10 per month now. Not necessarily all from Syria, I might add, but mostly from source countries and others, and also us destroying the infrastructure of the foreign fighter network inside Iraq in large measure.

Then, you have to work the whole strategic communication piece as I mentioned – the public affairs; public diplomacy. Again, trying to be first with the truth. Not trying to spin or anything like that. So, that’s what you have to do and that’s what’s required: a whole-of-government approach to put pressure on these organizations and take away from them what they need: weapons; access to weapons; cut down the flow of foreign fighters; take away their safe havens and sanctuaries; degrade the public support; attack

their ideology; cut off their command and control internally and to the senior leaders in the federal-administered tribal areas of Pakistan and reduce their access to money which is the oxygen for these organizations. That's how we applied those counter-insurgency principles in this particular case although, as I said you have to apply it differently in some others.

So, what did we do? Well, from 2004 to '09 the levels of security incidents – there were 1,800 of these incidents at the height around the June, '07 timeframe – attacks and attempted attacks. In other words, improvised explosive devices we found and cleared as well as those that went off. Just sheer attacks at that time in June were 160 per day. Keep that in mind when we show you where we have gotten to now which is, of course, somewhere around 20 per day or less – still serious, especially if they're the kind of attacks we saw in Baghdad last week. But vastly, vastly improved, and the difference that these last seven or eight months have made in allowing Iraqis again to improve and rebuild their infrastructure and improve basic services has been dramatic.

Now, if you're protecting the population you have to have a macabre metric like tracking violent civilian deaths – Iraqi and coalition data together (shows that) on December 2006 there were nearly 3,700 Iraqi civilians killed in a violent manner. Now, last month was not a good month. It went back up, and was the highest since about last year. But you can still see at a relatively, again relatively speaking, a much lower level than what was experienced during the height of the sectarian violence.

Now, a big piece in that are high-profile attacks. When I got back to Iraq my welcome back to Iraq was 42 car bombs in the first month of command, and it went up the next month, and it was very, very hard. They blew up bridges, power lines, the council representatives' auditorium – you name it. This is

was really tough, tough period. Over time, by that strategy against al Qaeda in Iraq, we were able to drive this down. It would go up periodically, and even as bad as last month was in terms of deaths the number of high-profile attacks actually came down to about the lowest they've had. But note now, this is still about 10 to 15 high-profile attacks per month, at least, and that's not good. But compared to where Iraq was it is again vastly improved and a real tribute to the Iraqi and our coalition forces.

If you want to see where al Qaeda was in 2006-2007, this is Baghdad, the Euphrates River Valley; Tigris River Valley; Mosul; the belts around Baghdad are the locations where al Qaeda was located. About seven million people were in Baghdad and actually, to be fair, there are little pinpoints in Baghdad now but they're much, much reduced. Still present in Iraq, particularly up in the north and then around Kirkuk and the Hamrin mountains, but again significantly reduced.

It's imperative that Iraq continue the kind of very high operational tempo of their operational forces, in particular, to keep these organizations on the run because you don't win this kind of endeavor – you don't plant the flag on the top of a hill and declare victory and go home. This is a tough struggle and it continues.

Let's switch to Afghanistan, where frankly the situation has gone in the other direction, and this is going to take sustained substantial commitment. There are already substantial additional forces – "enablers," as we call them – helicopters, unmanned aerial vehicles, route clearance units and all the rest; trainers for the Afghan forces and civilians working for the embassy in Kabul and outside it. They're headed there. General McChrystal is in the process of doing an assessment that will determine force options for the future depending on the level of risk relative to mission accomplishment. We have just considered his – what's called initial assessment – and I endorse that. I

agreed with it strongly and with the military implementation plan that it laid out to accomplish the mission that has been assigned to us. Let's not forget that mission. It is to keep Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary once again for al Qaeda and other transnational extremists that want to attack us and our partner nations around the world.

Now, clearly it's going to take more Afghan national army and police and there are recommendations in his reports on that. You can't succeed in Afghanistan without also seeing progress in Pakistan and we have a substantial effort there. But that is in support of them. They are the ones who are doing the fighting. They're doing the tough work. What we're trying to do is just enable our partners there. As in the case of Iraq you have to achieve unity of effort.

So, what do we have to do? We have to reverse the cycle of violence that has been escalating over the course of the last three years in particular, through traditional counter-insurgency techniques to serve and secure the population. Again, you're going to have to support reconciliation. You can't kill or capture your way out of this insurgency either.

So, there has to be reintegration of reconcilables and there's a program building to do that in partnership with the Afghan government. Clearly, their governmental capacity has to be developed, and that's an enormous challenge in a country where the illiteracy rate is as high as 70-80 percent and the police sometimes can't read the laws that they're enforcing. This is a big challenge.

The illegal narcotics industry, particularly in the south, fuels much of the insurgency. Again, that provides the money – the oxygen – that keeps that movement going, and that has to be defeated as well. Then these other tasks have to be taken in terms of supporting a variety of different nation-building

endeavors as well, because you cannot keep them from being a sanctuary for transnational extremists again without a comprehensive approach. You can't sit offshore and launch cruise missiles in, or carpet-bomb villages or something like that, needless to say.

Now, this is the situation: From 2004 to 2009 there's a cycle, and this is the fighting season during the summer when the snow is not deep, because keep in mind the altitudes at which our troopers are operating. You saw it go up substantially last year and then up even more this year and then, with the election, we had the highest level of incidents in a single day in the history there. But now it has actually come back down. Again, not a good trend, with the violence continuing to go up during that period.

As I mentioned earlier, there has been progress in Afghanistan in a host of different areas but it can't continue if we can't reverse this trend in the security situation.

Where is the violence? Well, it's right in Kabul; in the east – largely a Pushtun insurgency in that part of the country rather than the Turkmen back in the Tajik areas. The vast majority of the violence is in just ten percent of those districts, and that's where we have to focus our forces – and that's what we're doing.

In fact, that's where they're going. The marines are down in the provinces and doing extraordinarily good work. In fact, tomorrow I'm going down to San Diego and tell them that. That's where MARCENT, the marine component of Central Command, is located. A change in command tomorrow, we'll put our aviation brigade in here. The brigade is the 4th Brigade of the 82nd going in the south to overlay on the police and the army forces there, and our striker brigade has just become operational in the Kandahar region as well.



So, that's the lay-down, again focusing on the U.S. forces, of course, but noting that this is very much a coalition effort, with well over a third of the forces there coming from various NATO and non-NATO nations.

I want to close this part before the Q&A by reminding you what this is all about and who it is that turns these big ideas into reality on the ground – it is these individuals in this picture. I was privileged to re-enlist them, 1,215 of them, in a ceremony on the 4th of July in 2008. It was just a wonderful event, as you might imagine. I can tell you that there is no greater privilege than having been able to serve with individuals like this during four years in Iraq, and again I want to close by thanking you for supporting them and their families so magnificently.

Thank you very much.

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